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### **Harwich Arson Case Closed**

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Harwich Fire Chief Wilfred Remillard are pleased to announce that a difficult arson case was closed Tuesday when a Harwich man plead guilty to causing a gas explosion in his home. The explosion occurred on May 15, 2003 when a distraught Bradley Loring, age 57, attempted suicide the day after his 56 birthday at his home at 1785 Orleans Rd. in Harwich.

Mr. Loring plead guilty on May 25, 2004 in Barnstable Superior Court to one count of burning a dwelling. He was sentenced to three years of supervised probation and must obtain drug and alcohol counseling and treatment to avoid jail time. He has given up his right to collect on a \$200,000 insurance claim.

The entire South Team of State Police fire investigators assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal, and trained members of the Harwich Police and Fire Department investigated the explosion. Technical expertise was received from an electrical investigator, a gas inspector from the Department of Public Safety, a systems expert from the Department of Telecommunications and Energy and testing from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) laboratory. The case was prosecuted by the Cape and Islands District Attorney's Office.

Investigators believe that Mr. Loring used a pipe wrench to remove the drip cap on his furnace, something that prevents natural gas from entering the home, and then went upstairs to lay on the couch. An ignition source, most probably the pilot light on the hot water heater, ignited the gas that filled the basement causing a massive house explosion. Investigators believe that this was a failed suicide attempt by a distraught man.

The entire first floor of the home collapsed into the basement. Investigators, with the help of excavating equipment, shoveled out the entire basement in four hours. They found the drip cap had been removed from the furnace and experts determined that it had been forcibly removed by a tool, not by the explosion. After clearing all the debris from the cellar, one investigator used all his strength to tilt the furnace up a little while another

investigator looked underneath and discovered the bottle cap sized drip cap and a pipe wrench. These along with a section of pipe were sent to the FBI lab which confirmed that the drip cap had been removed by human hands prior to the fire. Investigators ruled out other possible ignition scenarios such as electricity.

State Fire Marshal Coan said, “While we hope Mr. Loring receives the help he needs, this case shows how experienced, well-trained and committed fire investigators working closely with technical experts can look at a huge pile of rubble and pinpoint the cause. Because so much evidence is destroyed in fires, it is hard at times to rule out all but one ignition scenario to determine the cause. And in this case, a lot of unglamorous grunt work made the difference between blaming the gas company and finding a person bent on self-destruction.”